



News Release

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Fewer Utah Healthcare Providers Are Advising Smoking Patients to Quit Doctors urged to help patients quit Nov. 17 for Great American Smokeout

(Salt Lake City, UT) – New Utah Department of Health data show the percentage of smokers who recall being advised by their healthcare providers to quit has dropped by 18 percent since 2002. Fewer smokers were counseled to quit in 2004 than in previous years. Data has been collected since 2000.

The statewide Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) randomly telephoned Utahns ages 18 and older, to ask about their health behaviors. Less than 60 percent of smokers who visited a healthcare provider within the past year said they had been advised by a doctor to quit. This is significantly down from 71.8 percent in 2002.

The 2004 survey asked smokers how their healthcare providers helped them to quit. Less than a third of smokers reported receiving any help: 30.4 percent reported that at least once, a doctor, nurse or other health professional recommended or discussed medication to help them quit smoking. Only 24 percent said providers at least once recommended or discussed methods and strategies other than medication.

“These numbers are not where they should be and the healthcare community needs to turn that trend around,” says Brian Zehnder, M.D., Exodus Healthcare Network medical director and member of the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Utah (CTFU). “Research shows that people are more likely to quit when a healthcare provider advises them to do so. Their likelihood of success is dramatically increased when this advice is combined with counseling and appropriate quitting medications. I have seen it happen in my own practice.”

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Page 2 of 2 Fewer Utah Healthcare Providers Are Advising Smoking Patients to Quit

That's why CTFU members will be contacting providers in conjunction with the American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout®, Nov. 17. They will remind providers of their important role, and will refer them to free community resources for providers and patients.

Resources include the Utah Tobacco Quit Line (1-888-567-TRUTH) and the on-line service Utah Quit Net (www.utahquitnet.com). Also, CTFU has developed a new *The TRUTH Network: Treating Tobacco Dependence Guide* for physicians, nurses, dentists and dental hygienists, pharmacists and other health professionals. Helpful information about insurance, medications and treatment best practices can be downloaded free from <http://www.tobaccofreeutah.org/healthcare.html>.

"Tobacco use is still the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S. and kills more than 1,200 Utahns yearly. There are more than 190,000 smokers in Utah and 78 percent would like to quit," says Heather Borski, program manager, Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, UDOH. "We hope that healthcare providers will use The TRUTH Network materials to help their patients succeed."

The American Cancer Society (ACS) holds the Great American Smokeout® each November to help smokers quit cigarettes for at least one day, hoping they will quit forever. Since 1977, the Smokeout has challenged Americans to quit smoking and fueled a cultural revolution against tobacco. For more information, visit www.cancer.org or call 1.800.ACS.2345.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.